

Defender General's Family Support Project

FY 2013 Report

OVERVIEW: The Family Support Project represented **77** families involving at least **118** children during Fiscal Year 2012-2103. The project spent \$68,238 in hours billed by its professionals, breaking down to a cost of \$886 per case.

SERVICES: Family Support Workers are assigned in the very difficult cases where clients battle multiple issues and have multiple needs, many of them interwoven with poverty. The issues clients face include: lack of access to housing, transportation, substance abuse treatment, mental health care, job opportunities and benefits. The Family Support Project has a track record of success in helping clients obtain these necessary services. At a time when affordable housing is scarce to non-existent and there are long waiting lists for treatment services, Family Support Workers have been remarkably successful in helping:

- ❖ **62 clients (80%) obtain substance abuse and/or mental health treatment**
- ❖ **35 clients (45%) obtain safe and stable housing**
- ❖ **Clients and their children in at least 73 instances access essential services such as food, transportation, benefits, medical care, daycare, and community support**
- ❖ **16 clients (21%) obtain and maintain jobs**

Family Support Workers have improved case outcomes. 74% of the cases have been reunited or are on track for reunification.

- ❖ **18 families have been reunited**
- ❖ **34 families are on track for reunification and are actively receiving support**
- ❖ **5 truancy cases have been successfully closed, and the children are back in school**
- ❖ **6 parents were supported in voluntarily relinquishing their parental rights; at least 2 of them so that family members could adopt their children**
- ❖ **14 parents had their parental rights terminated**

HOW THE FAMILY SUPPORT WORKERS HELPED FAMILIES

#1. Young drug addicted mother with a special needs child

A young drug addicted mother with learning disabilities had an infant with complex medical issues. DCF took the child into custody. With the help of a dedicated Family Support Worker, DCF, and a good lawyer, she was able to have visitation with the child every day during the week for several hours and was able to Skype with him on other occasions. Mom got into a good drug rehab program and with very little backsliding, was able to become clean. She is a devoted member of AA now. She also got into mental health treatment. Although there were concerns that she would not be able to learn how to care for her child's significant medical needs, she and the Family Support Worker attended every class the nurses offered on dealing with the child's special issues. She showed them she could learn and she did. The child is now at home in her custody and thriving. But for the dedicated support of the Family Support Worker and DCF's willingness to give this young mother a chance the child would never have been reunited.

#2. Abused homeless mother

Mother was living with an abusive partner and her three children when they became homeless. DCF took the children into custody upon reports of neglect by both parents and abuse by Dad. Mom lived for a while with Dad in an unheated trailer. She had no income, no education, and no confidence that she could do anything. With the help of the Family Support Worker, she was eventually able to separate from her abusive partner, move into a shelter, and get mental health services. Away from her abusive partner, she began to blossom. She found a cleaning job in the evenings and began increasing visitation with her children. With the help of the FSW, she was able to obtain a subsidized apartment. She began living with her youngest daughter and transitioning the older children to her home. She has gained confidence and new skills. She was able to improve her parenting and attend school meetings with her children. Discharge of custody is scheduled soon.

#3. Alcohol abusing homeless dad

Mother was out of the picture and Dad had been evicted and was homeless. DCF took the child into custody. Dad had also been abusing alcohol. With the help of the Family Support Worker, he was able to stop drinking, get into treatment, find a subsidized apartment and furnish it with donated furniture and cookware from the local churches. With the FSW's help he found a daycare; and DCF found money to fund it. He is currently working. Child reunited and custody discharged.

CERTIFICATE OF APPRECIATION

AWARDED JOINTLY TO

Office of the Defender General Parent
Representation Program

&

Vermont Parent Representation Program, Inc.

For exemplary efforts to improve outcomes for children and families through
effective representation and advocacy

Awarded this 21st day of March, 2011



Paul L. Reiber, Chief Justice
On Behalf of The Justice for Children Task Force

